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THE STORY OF A HUNCHBACK



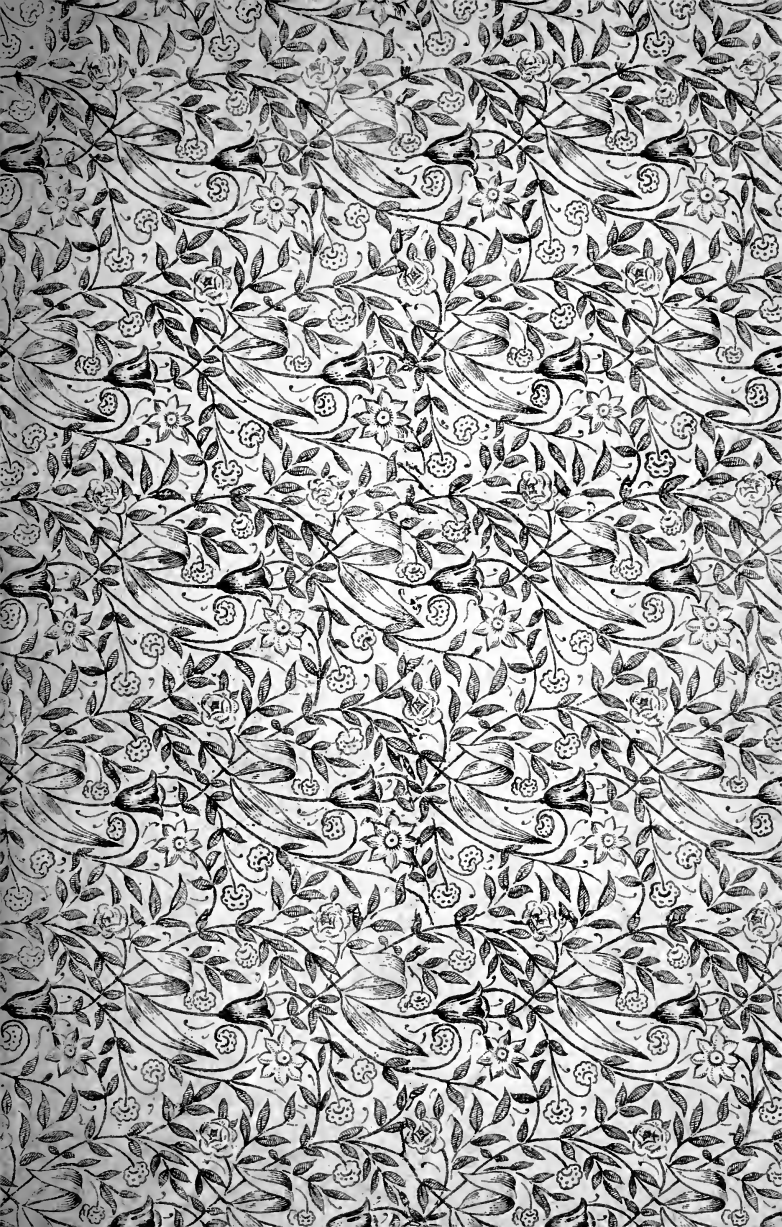
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THE STORY OF A HUNCHBACK.

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STORY OF A HUNCHBACK.

By J. L.

"Via crucis via lucis."



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TO
MY DEAR FATHER,
IN
LOVING AND REVERENT
REMEMBRANCE.

THE
STORY OF A HUNCHBACK.

PART I.

WHEN Nature slowly lifts the hand
Held tenderly o'er childhood's gaze,
To shield it from the world's broad glare,
We smile to see the glance, half bold,
Half startled, of the fresh young eyes ;
Yet some there are, alas ! to whom
This earliest glance reveals a waste —
A desert, boundless, overarched
With burning skies ; ah, piteous
It is to see a shadow fall
O'er eyes scarce opened to the day !
Our early grief, our young despair,
Though lightly held in after years,

With chill breath pale the blood of youth,
And wither frail spring flowers of joy
Within the heart. For me, I know
That, moving back across the years,
And looking with the eyes of old
Down vistas of dark days to come,
I feel once more the crushing weight
That lay upon my childish heart.
Ah, yes, the puny hunchback-child
Who stole away to hide his tears,
When others ran to merry sports,
Had visions of the coming years
That were not fair to look upon.
When first I woke to know my doom,
And felt its prison walls grow strait
About my life, I could but beat
And bruise my heart against the bars;
For young desire ne'er yields to fate
Without a struggle, blind and fierce
And impotent, that ends at last
In blank defeat; and so I lived
At strife, a rebel in God's world,

And shook my childish hand tight clenched
Against the power that shaped my lot.

One priceless gift was mine at birth,
Whose potent spell the years drew forth—
A sense that thrilled to ecstasy,
When beauty swept with touch of might
Its vibrant chords. The mists of time
Have never closed around the hour
When first this inward sense awoke
To conscious life; I lay alone
At sunset, on a grassy bank,
And felt the mellow sky stretch wide
And calm above the quiet earth;
When, suddenly, a lonely cloud
That drifted overhead, caught fire,
And sailed, a floating flame of rose,
Across an amber sea; the throb
Of frightened joy that shook my soul
Beats through me still! they found me there
In tears, and said, half pitiful:
“He’s frightened to be left alone,

Poor lamb! He's but a baby still."
Those early days! their dreary ghost
Stares at me still in lonely hours.
From vacant room to vacant room,
In that sad home, whose sun of joy
Had sunk behind a low, green grave—
A sad-eyed, feeble child, I crept,
And blindly sought, with groping heart,
The mother-love that could not stoop
Through gates of pearl to fold me 'round.
My father's love, deep-channelled, strong,
And still, moved on, and felt no need
To burst its bounds in those fresh floods
Of loving speech that keep hearts green.
With steadfast will and kindly art
He strove to prop my drooping life,
But knew not how to make the sap
Within flow fresh with quickening power.
His careful thought it was, I knew
In later years, that drew a shield
Between my weakness and the world,
By choosing that our home should lie

Away from cities, 'mid the green
Of quiet fields, where I might stray
In peace, not stabbed at every step
By careless eyes ; and where fair sights
And fragrant airs and happy sounds
Might reach me with their gracious touch.
He passed his days amid the din
And ceaseless jar of city life,
And brought a worn and saddened heart,
At evening, to a lonely hearth ;
And through the lagging hours of day,
A silence deep and brooding filled
The mournful house, through which I heard
My stealing footsteps, one by one.
A child of solitary ways
And silent thoughts, I lived apart,
And no one saw the waking soul
Feel vaguely through the dark for light,
And love, and God, the central heart
Of love and light, whose glory throned
Above the stars, gleamed faint and far.
My father, lost among the mists

Of doubt that overbrood the age,
And of a mind too strictly true
To feign a faith where faith was dead,
Let fall no word of God or heaven ;
My fond old nurse, a faithful soul
And simple, muttered Latin prayers,
And prated oft of virgin, saint,
And pope, but so o'erlaid the face
Of Truth divine with tawdry veils
Of Romish weaving, that I lost
Its brow sublime and smile of peace
Beneath a shroud of glittering gauze.
But, though the doors of conscious thought
Were closed, God's love, like Christ of old,
Passed in, unknown, with breath of peace.
No soul is left to grope alone;
Through thickest night, a hand unfelt
Upholds and guides our faltering steps;
And oft, from nature, robe of God,
As from the seamless garment's hem,
Flows healing virtue on the souls
That know not yet His face, but press

*

Behind Him in the throng of life.
The sunlit air, the happy sky,
And fields, and hills, and springing flowers,
Their ministries of comfort wrought
Upon my heart in those young days;
And ere I reached the glimmering arch
Where eager and reluctant feet
Pass forth to brave a world untried,
There came an angel, unaware,—
An angel splendor-winged, with breath
Of quickening flame, whom men call Art,—
And touched mine eyes, and all the earth
Grew broad, and fair, and full of light.
That strong, wild thrill, that mingled sense
Of power and longing infinite —
When *first*, from lonely heights of soul
Beyond our ken there leap in joy
The sparkling streams of eager thought —
There's naught in all this life of ours,
Save wakening love, so sweet, so strange,
So full of rapture touched with pain!
Like soft spring airs that wake the chords

Of vague regret, steals o'er my heart
The memory of those blissful hours,
When, sheltered in a quiet nook
Roofed o'er with leaves and flecks of blue,
Where silence trembled into sound
More soft, and sound in silence merged,
I lay, and dreamed, and wove a web
Of pencilled shapes around the dreams
That trooped through fancy's radiant halls.
A narrow strip of vivid blue
Between two dull and leaden clouds,
Those fair, calm years of wakening power
And fervid life shone brightly out
Between a past of dreary years,
And darker future sweeping near.

PART II.

Scarce had my heart, unused to joy,
Its wings in sunny skies unfurled,
When, smitten by a sudden shaft,
It quivered, bleeding, back to earth.
Death from my father's yearning eyes
Had swept the clinging mists of earth
To let the great Beyond shine in,
And I stood shivering in the chill
And vacant gloom of life, alone.
An upturned face, calm, pallid, strange,
That filled with breathless, creeping dread
The darkened room where, mute and
 stunned,
I gazed, and could not move nor weep—
A coffin closed above that face
Which still on me gleamed white and
 strange,

Then silence, blankness, pressing close
With stifling weight around my heart.
O, memory, throw not back thy light
So vividly on that dead face,
That new-made grave, that dumb despair :
Across the fields of youth, grown fair
With timid shoots of hope's fresh green,
There swept a bitter, barren flood,
From whose dark waves to darker skies
I raised a dull and vacant gaze.
The slender wall of human love
That screened my spirit from the void—
The infinite unknown—was rent,
And wailing winds, from lonely wastes,
Rushed in and smote the chords of dread.
Art, tranquil-eyed, serene, draws back,
And leaves us with our first, fresh grief;
For well she knows the blinding tears
That blur, to-day, her visions fair
Will fall, and leave the inward sight,
For high revealings, clearer grown ;
And waits till we have ceased to weep,

And looking up reach out once more
To grasp her trailing robes of light ;
But God waits not for tears to cease ;
Our grief, though oft we know it not,
Is but the shadow of His wings,
Outspread to fold our trembling souls.
Unconscious of His brooding love,
I saw the outer light grow dim,
But felt not yet His mighty heart
Against my soul beat, through the dark ;
I only knew that joy had fled,
And life was desolate and vain.

Behind me, eighteen quiet years ;
Sad, lonely oft, yet sheltered years ;
Before me, paths unknown that lay
Amid the eager, jostling throng
Who thrust aside, with pitying scorn,
The stunted, weak, unneeded lives
That creep along their busy ways—
So stood I—met the eyes of fate
With steady gaze, and chose my lot.

I left the green, familiar fields,
Long loved, and trod with lingering feet ;
And sought the city, there to plunge
With shrinking yet unswerving will
Within its hurrying tide of life.
One quiet refuge still was mine,
An upper room, whence, looking out
Above a crowded street, I felt
The silence of the sky descend
In blessing on the homes of men,
And hushed my heart against its calm.
But through the day, I sat and toiled
With happier toilers, unto whom
The art I turned to for relief
Brought eager joy; as, once, to me
With flush of dawning power it brought.
Amid their wealth of bounding life,
That flung its foam of careless speech
Abroad in sparkling showers of mirth,
I felt the loneliness of one
Who, through a grating, sees the sky,
And hears the songs of birds in spring.

Their furtive glances oft I felt
Turned toward me, as I bent at work,
The pencil moving, though the heart
No more moved with it as of old.
One glance, more gentle than the rest,
Left in my mind its haunting light,
That first awoke the morbid fear
Of pity, born of pride and pain;
Then drew me by its subtle charm,
To seek it, as a ray of joy.
From one it came, whose clear blue eyes,
Undimmed by shade of guile or grief,
Shone bright and soft as summer skies.
The merriest of them all he seemed,
And through his fresh, spontaneous mirth
There flashed no flame of mocking scorn.
I loved to watch him as he worked,
With rapid hand and eager eyes,
Then, throwing back the wave of hair
That swept his brows, and pausing, gazed,
With gathering frown, as one who sees
His bright ideal missed once more.

One day, when all the rest had gone,
The work hour being past, and I,
Absorbed, a moment stayed
To seize and bind a fleeting thought,
He lingered, hesitating, near;
Then with a sudden smile came close,
And stood, in silence, at my side.
And when, my work complete, I rose,
He said,—not with the air of one
Who gives a favor, giving praise:—
“A glance, a master-sweep of brush,
And on your canvas captive lies
The beauty that my hand pursues
In vain. Oft in my jealous dreams
I see our mighty mistress smile,
And point to Leslie Howard’s name
Upon the future’s secret page;
And well I know the laurel crown
I toil and pant to win, will fall
Without a struggle on your brows.”
“Give me the buoyant life that fills
Your veins, the strength you lightly wear,

The power to move among my peers
And share the hopes and loves and joys
That stir the common heart of man —
And take the paltry crown of Art
Which, should I wear it, would but fix
The cold and curious eyes of men
On one to whom their gaze is pain.”
The words rushed forth; but as they fell,
I hated them for laying bare
The wound that silence thought to hide;
His truer instinct, heeding not
The warning flush that burnt my cheek,
Touched fearlessly, yet tenderly,
The quivering chord that none before,
Through all the years, had dared to
touch.

“The joy of strength that fills my veins
I share with all the lower lives
That feed and sleep and move and rest,
And have no sense of aught beyond;
But manhood’s grandest might is yours,
Who lift a burden as you climb

In triumph up the steeps of art.
Fear not the cold and curious eyes,
Nor yet the pitying glance of men,
For they who conquer weakness, stand
Among the heroes of the world,
Who win and wear its reverent love."
A gleam of vivid sunshine fell,
With sudden glory, through the bars
That shut me from the outer world:
I grasped his hand, but spoke no word,
And with a bright and swift "Good-bye!
We meet to-morrow!" he was gone.

In Arthur Linden, nature's hand
Had blent the glow of southern suns
With breezes of the bracing north:
His tenderness made sweet his strength;
His pity kept his gladness warm.
The shadow on another's life
To him was like a beckoning hand
That claimed a share in his warm light;
And so, when I, whose body bore

Before all eyes its seal of pain,
Heart-sick and lonely crossed his path,
His eager pity, reaching forth,
Threw round my heart its quick embrace.
A friendship, growing warm and close
As time passed on, knit fast our hearts,
He giving, I receiving all,
Save as my very need itself
Was minister of joy to him,
Through love's deep mystery whereby
Who giveth most hath largest bliss.
The sunshine of his radiant smile
Around my lonely room he shed;
And left the memory of his voice
To fill with sense of human love
The silence, when alone I sat
And faced the haunting shapes of doubt
That chilled me with their icy touch.
His breath rekindled into flame
The fires of thought that dimly glowed
Beneath the ashes of spent grief;
And I grew conscious of a life

Beyond the aching sense of loss,
As hand in hand we wandered on,
Where shining foot-prints of great souls
Make luminous the ways of art.
To his bright soul the beautiful
Was as a finer air wherein
To soar and breathe delight;
While I, from tossing deeps of doubt
And pain uplooking, felt a vague
And yearning sense of some vast truth,
Beyond my grasp, wherein should meet
The holy and the beautiful
In union flawless, absolute,—
Forever whole, forever one.
He, conscious of no discord, lack,
Or thwarted longing, slowly sipped
With lingering lips the cup of joy,
And marvelled as I, panting, pressed
In ever baffled, vain pursuit
Behind a flying dream of truth.
Through glow, through gloom, o'er fragrant fields

And burning sands I followed on,
And still, upon the misty verge
Of farthest thought, the vision gleamed.
Oh weary search! Oh needless pain!
Since at my side, the Truth Himself,
In love and yearning pity moved.

Among new-fledged and dazzled minds,
Which fancied that the sun of truth
Rose when their blinking eyes unclosed,
I daily met an easy doubt
Of aught beyond the sphere of sense,
With careless air worn jauntily
Like some new mode, or lightly dropped,
With shallow jests from laughing lips:
And once, when I in silence stood
Applauding not, amid a group
Who hailed with loud applause a shaft
Of pointless wit, aimed carelessly
Against the saving hope to which,
Through all its anguish, sin and shame,
The struggling world has ever clung,

They pressed me with a mocking charge
Of faith "in that vain, empty dream
Of God and heaven, that narrow minds
Will cling to still, though science, wise
With Nature's larger teaching, sees
In changeless law the only God."

And I, too sad for scorn, replied:

"I know not yet the God whose name
From mouth to mouth you lightly toss,
But to my ear, from awful deeps
Of silent darkness round the world,
Comes back the echo of your jest —
A hollow murmur full of woe
And longing.— If we are indeed
But transient breathings of a life
Without a soul—if on the verge
Of nothingness we stand and gaze,
And clutch with feeble hands the sense
Of being ere it slips our grasp,
Is then our fate so blest that we
Should boast our heritage of death,
And make a sport of happier hopes?"

A smile of light surprise went round,
And as I slowly moved away
One whispered, yet I caught the words —
“To such, life must indeed be dark!
They should be left to die at birth,
As in the wiser days of Greece.”
And I, in bitterness of heart,
(Forgive me Lord!) thought, “Aye, they
 should,
If what these babbling sages teach
Be true, and sense the bound of life.”
It chanced that, as I left this group
Of self-admiring votaries
To trim their lamps before the shrine
Of doubt, I sought the home of one,
A fellow artist, who lay ill
And (as I feared) without a friend.

A tender glory from far skies,
That flamed around the dying sun,
Made fair the room wherein he lay;
And, pausing at the open door,

I saw it light the lifted face
Of one who prayed beside the bed.
No prayer, save muttered Latin words,
Caught up in childish days as charms
To soothe or balk a dreaded power,
Had ever fallen on my ear,
Till through me as I listening stood
There swept a voice that seemed to float
In strong repose o'er mighty deeps
Of being; and I grew aware
Of words that caught away my soul
Above the endless round of doubt,
And held it, poised, in light serene.
"Most Pitiful! whose depths of love,
Like sunlit air, enfold the world,
This blinded child in darkness gropes;
Yet, like a wakening bird at dawn,
Doth faintly feel a thrill of light
Steal through his being; and is fain
To greet the sun; O Christ, in whom
The human heart of God laid bare,
In utmost love and suffering beat

Beneath the spurning feet of men,
And still, in changeless pity, beats!
I plead not, what am I to plead
For love that doth outrun our thought?
But with my prayer I fain would guide
His groping hand Thine hand to grasp:
The thronging host of hopes and fears
And passions and delights that filled
With noisy life his fleeting days,
And drowned the Spirit's call, has fled;
A soul disrobed of earth, alone,
He stands amid the awful shapes
Of things eternal, and his cry
Goes up to Thee; O Thou to whom
The first, faint, struggling breath of souls
Is precious, lift him, Lord of love,
And let him feel Thy folding arms!"
A low sigh broke across the words,
And he who prayed arose, and stood
In silence by the pillowed face
Whose flickering light the hand of death
Had caught away from mortal eyes:

Then, with the look a mother gives
Her tired child who sleepeth soft,
Bent low and kissed the pallid brow.

With footsteps hushed, I turned away,
And from the house passed blindly on,
Rapt, trembling, in the vivid sense
Of some vast presence, pitying, pure,
Sublime, revealed within my soul.
And while earth slept, and stars kept watch
Through silent hours, heart-hushed, I moved
Beside the earthly ways of Him
Whose footprints, on the snowy heights
Sun bathed, serene, of perfect life,
Still lure the slow-paced ages on.
The veil of creeds, through which the light
That lighteneth all the weary world
Too oft but dimly struggles forth,
I flung aside ; and saw the face
Of Him I followed, from the fires
Of blended love and pain, shine fair
And ever fairer as I gazed :

Till, softly, as the rising moon
That climbs behind the hills, and sheds
A fair, faint dawn above their tops,
Then cleaves the sky with silver edge,
And rounding to a perfect orb,
Thrills all the air with tender light,
Within my soul a vision rose,
That filled the utmost deeps of thought
With quivering waves of joy and awe—
The vision of a mighty love,
Forth reaching from the heart of God,
Through human hands, to lift the world
Toward heaven—the vision of that love
Rejected, scorned, yet triumph-crowned;
By might of suffering, strong to break
The chains of sin, and draw the soul
Through cleansing fires to life divine.
“O, Love! O, Love ineffable!
That by Thy power upliftest souls
As from the ocean deeps the sun
Uplifts the clouds—I turn to Thee!
Oh, lift me! lift me! for Thou canst!”

So cried I as the vision dawned :
Then from my spirit fell the bonds
Of doubt,—new-born of love, I lay,
A child within the arms of God,
Without a thought beyond His face.

The morning broke : the world without
Awoke ; the daily round of life
Began once more ; but in my heart
The freshness of a primal dawn
Made fair the common light of earth :
Life lay illumined, pain and grief
Seemed only as the rugged steeps
Whereby the soul must climb to reach
The heights of being ; and the sky
Of love, pure azure, clasped the world.

PART III.

The calm years, rich with broadening life
And ever deepening peace, passed on ;
The bar that held my soul aloof
From others, melted in the fire
Of love divine : no more apart
In solitudes of pain and doubt
I brooded o'er the woes of earth,
But, passing forth, and pressing near,
To hearts that failed 'neath weary loads,
I strove by gentle force of love,
And patience warm with quenchless hope,
To draw them toward those mighty arms
That wait to lift from every soul
The burden of its doubt and sin.
And oft I trembled with the joy
That thrills exultant, rapturous,
From all the quivering harps of heaven —

The joy of seeing smiles of peace
On troubled faces softly dawn,
As over groping hands closed warm
The clasp of love, that neither life
Nor death has power to loose ; and oft
Alas ! I tasted of His pain
Who saw with agony of love
Unbounded, fathomless, the souls
He came to free, content with chains.
One shadow haunted all my joy ;
The friend who first with vital warmth
Of human sympathy, had stirred
To quicker beat my failing pulse,
Walked on beneath a sky of joy
O'er which no darkly gathered clouds
Had drawn the brooding shades of life,
With eyes too full of happy light
To crave the shining of God's face.
When, in the flush of hopes new found
I spoke of healing for the world,
Of God brought near to man, of peace
In pain and triumph over sin,

He gently smiled, as one who hears
A dreamer murmuring broken words
Of woods and fields and waves of blue,
And will not break his happy sleep—
Then said: "Most glad I am, dear friend.
Your goal, long sought, is won at last ;
For me, I see the fields of life
Stretch wide and fair, and take the paths
I find, that lead my willing feet
Through fragrant groves by sparkling
streams ;
To you I leave the dizzy ledge,
Where truth with doubtful balance treads."
No mocking word e'er passed his lips ;
And yet I knew he looked on me
As on a child who reaches forth
To grasp his image in a glass.
I could but hope that God's dear love,
With daily pressure still and strong,
Would force the portals of his heart :
But oft I feared that naught but winds
Of mighty woe could burst their bars,

To let the waiting Christ pass in.
Our love unsevered by the strain
Of thoughts that farther pressed apart,
As time went by, still held us close.

One sunny day in early Spring,
When sheltered snows that lingered still
Fed sparkling rills, and that first breath
Drawn softly by the wakening year,
Stirred joy, that yearning, broke in pain,
He greeted me with shining eyes,
And like a happy child, poured forth
The joy that sparkled through his glance :
“My own Queen Mab, my fairy queen
Who sends her flying elves by stealth
To fill my canvas with her dreams,
Will soon be at my side to breathe
Her secret magic in my ear ;
Beware, my friend ! we yet shall snatch
Those flaunting laurels from your brows.”
And then I knew he spoke of Grace —
A sister dearly loved, whose name,

With proud and tender praises blent,
Was often on the brother's lips,
And who, through all their orphaned life,
Had made her home with distant friends,
But now, a woman, with the right
To make her choice of lot, was fain
To fill for him the woman's place,
Where yet none dearer sat enshrined.
"Come, you shall see the home I choose,
And help to make it fair; we'll have
No desert blank of whited walls
Around the eyes that love to rest
Upon the living bloom of earth."
I trembled as he lightly spoke,
Half conscious of reluctant dread,
That blended with a quivering sense
Of coming joy: a foot-fall faint,
Far heard, woke echoes in the deeps
Of formless thought, that would not die,
But sounded clearly, strangely on,
Through happy hours, wherein we strove
With playful rivalry of brush

And fancy to make fair the house,
Where eager love was fain to light
The hearth-fires of a new-made home.

I, living in a world apart,
Whose bound no woman's foot had passed,
Had kept the stainless reverence
And sacred tenderness of thought
That soften, like a floating haze,
The dewy morning hours of life.
To me, imprisoned in a form
That moved the pity of the strong
And fair, the thought of woman's love
Was like an Eden, never trod,
Close guarded by a sword of flame.
Oft, as a homeless wanderer looks
Through lighted casements of bright homes,
I gazed with yearning hopelessness
Upon the light of wedded joy;
Then, clasping close the hand divine,
Walked on, in peace, beneath calm stars.
But now, this far-heard footstep broke

The starlit silence round my heart
With presage of a coming change.

Unworded fancies, dim and sweet,
Breathed outward through the forms I chose
To wreath around the womanhood
Whose unknown glories filled my dreams
With radiance tremulous and fair.
Pure lilies, and that faint, flushed flower
That nestles with its lowly leaves
Against the beating heart of Spring;
Far glimmerings of snow-clad peaks,
And gleams of blue through clustering
leaves,
Where veils 'neath which my thought
stole forth,
Close shrouded from the common eye;
While through my musings ran this song,
That seemed a breathing from the lips
Of the far Future whose vague form
Swept dimly toward me through the dark:

Upon a river's brink
A lily fair
Her brows uplifted light
Through summer air.

The soft breeze whispered low
His tale of bliss;
And touched her velvet cheek
With tender kiss:

But ah, the fickle breeze
Passed swiftly on:
And stole away the joy
His lips had won.

The sunlight on her heart
In sweet rest lay,
And dreamed, in golden calm,
The hours away.

But when night beckoned soft,
The false sun fled,
And left his love to mourn,
Uncomforted.

But ever at her feet
The river flowed;
And in his constant heart
Her image glowed.

Through daylight and through dark
His tide, unknown,
Sent freshness through her life,
Yet flowed alone.

And when she drooped and died,
Upon his breast
He bore her tenderly
Away to rest.

There came a day,—how blue and fair
It shines within my memory still!
When Arthur bade me, with a smile,
Come home and see the nested bird
For whose sweet sake our eager hands
Had conjured with the spells of art.

I see her as she lightly rose
To greet her brother's friend, her glance
Of pity veiled with woman's art,
Afraid of wounding when she longed
To soothe; I feel again the pain
Unspeakable, with which I stood
A boy in stature, but a man
In soul, with manhood's fervent might
Of being, crowned,—and met the eyes
Of her through whom my floating dream
Of woman's perfectness reached forth,
And touched me with a human hand.
A moment through my being surged
A fiery flood that burned away
The thought of God, then suddenly,
With swiftly sinking waves, it fled;
And that still sea of peace, wherein
The image of the love supreme
Lies mirrored, filled my soul once more.
The shade of self paled out of sight;
And, overflowed with pure joy,
I lifted, like a lowly flower

That feels the sun and rests content,
My passive heart, and drank the light
Of her sweet presence in rapt calm.
Her beauty! Think you I have words
For that? Nay, ask the rose of June,
That pulses from its throbbing heart
Pure flushes, growing softly pale
As loth to bare before the world
The secret of its tender fire;
Go, listen to the dying fall
Of liquid melodies, or watch
The sunset touch the hills with light,
Not of the earth, or heaven—too pure
For earth, too passion-tinged for heaven;
And if their clearer speech doth fail,
Think not that any word of mine
The subtle mystery could reach.

As homeward, 'neath the clear spring sky,
Star-luminous, and bare of clouds,
My slow feet passed, I bared my brows
In silent reverence of joy

That God had made the earth so fair,
That love was sweet, and hearts were glad,
And though no heart in all the throng
Should e'er, by sweet allurements drawn,
Press close to blend with mine its beats
In rhythmic harmony of love,
Yet through my soul surged mightily
The love and joy of all the world.

A stream, that long had flowed unknown
Beneath my life, burst suddenly
To light, and glad with stainless blue,
Its happy secret sparkled forth
In golden-gleaming, murmurous waves.
Its low song rippled through my thought,
And all the common ways of life
Were touched with dreamful tenderness.
The young, fresh green that fringed the
 streets,
Clear, sudden bird-songs, trilling high
Above their din, and purest blue
Around the slowly melting pearl

Of morning clouds,—by spells unknown,
Their subtle sweetness interfused
With something beautiful and strange
That softly stirred within my heart.
I knew not how nor whence it came,
But felt it touch the hidden chords
Of shrinking joy and blissful pain.

Night after night, with quickened pulse,
And passionate, expectant thrill,
I lifted to my eager lips
The brimming cup that fate held forth,
And knew not that its sparkling draught
Should slowly fill my veins with fire.
Night after night I steeped my heart
In mellow radiance, falling fair
From her clear mind whose changeful
thoughts
Their tints ethereal softly blent.
Her fancy, light as floating down
Tossed idly by the summer breeze,
With sportive grace, played airily

Around our slower-moving thought;
And yet, beneath her lighter mood
There glowed a fire of life intense
That oft burst forth in sudden flame
Of eager speech, and dimly showed
Like beacons on a rock-bound shore
A tossing sea of troublous thought.
Like Raphael's Margaret, in the lone
And shadowed wilderness of life,
Her white feet on the dragon's wing,
She stood, and felt his fiery breath
Against her stainless garments blown,
And searched the dark with baffled gaze
That could not pierce the murky air
To rest with Margaret's on His face
Who shines away the shades of fear.
Oh, how I longed that, through my soul,
Some ray, though faint, of God's pure light,
Upon her straining eyes might fall!
Oft, when in quiet evening hours
Our happy talk took graver tone
From some new-fallen shade of grief

On other lives, and I, with words
Too slow and faltering for the thought
That pressed for fuller utterance, spoke
Of that deep mystery of pain
Through which, as through the belt of fire
'Round Dante's purgatorial mount,
All souls must pass who fain would
 breathe

The stormless air of perfect life,—
I felt her clear gaze search my face
With eager longing in its deeps;
And watched the slowly-mounting flush
That told the dawning of new thought.
At last, there came a sudden change
Which laid my life so close to hers
That I could dare, with gentle hand,
To lift the veil of shy reserve
Close-drawn around her inner thought.
A fever creeping through close streets
Where crowded life sowed seeds of death,
With blighting breath smote suddenly
A poor street child, whose haggard face

Behind her stand of early flowers
Had learned to greet me with a smile,
As day by day I paused to buy,
And strove to give a human tongue
To the sweet messages breathed forth
Through dewy petals from God's heart.
And, learning that she lay in pain
Beyond the reach of woman's care,
I saw that my unskilful hands
Must act the woman's as they might;
And seeking, found her fever-parched,
Alone, with blank, delirious eyes.
And while I bent above the face
So piteous in its shrivelled youth,
A staggering step without drew near
And paused within the open door:
Then, reading by the lightning flash
Of instant thought, the whole sad tale,
I left the bed and turned to face
The drunken father, as he stood,
Surprised, in sullen, bestial rage.
An instant, with a savage stare,

He met my gaze; then raised his arm
And with a sudden, dizzy sense
Of blinding pain, I reeled and fell.

When from the dark and vast unknown,
My spirit floated back to light,
I lay in Arthur Linden's arms,
And with a dreamy wonder saw
The quick tears gathering in his eyes,
As, bending low above my face,
He watched the life-tide creeping back;
Then, like the sound of far joy-bells
Heard faintly through a sunny sea
Of golden air, fell on my ear
The distant voice of her I loved.
As, slowly, in my dazzled sense
The outer world took shape once more,
I saw the dear, familiar walls
That with so many happy hours
Had blent their pictured fantasies,
And knew I lay in Arthur's home,
That Grace was moving overhead,

While through the open casement flowed
A blended stream of breeze and light;
And as I vainly strove to speak,
The silence Arthur gently broke
With playful tenderness of speech:
"What hero of Homeric days
Had not his favorite god, who moved
Beside him, wrapped in clouds, and flashed
To light when danger called? Behold
The faithful Mars who felled your foe
And bore his hero from the field."
While yet he spoke, Grace, drawing near,
Had paused within the door, and stood
With something stirring in her face
So strangely sweet, I dared not gaze,
But dropped my glance, as one who fears
To taste the cup he may not drain.
Her gentle sympathy with smiles
And light responses met, she stood
In silence at my side, her hand
On Arthur's arm; till, looking up,
He stilled her fears with sportive words:

“What says our silent sister Grace
Of this new Curtius, who would fain
Fling down his life to close the gulf
That yawns across the world?” And

Grace,

Uplifting eyes wherein there shone
The light of some fair thought, replied:
“The knighthood of my early dream
Still walks the earth; and Galahad
Perchance has found the Holy Grail,
And bears it unto dying lips.”
The fresh, glad month of June had fled;
And after many days of pain,
I, lifted to a window, sat,
With dreamy languor looking down
Upon the moving life below,
And turning o’er, with lingering touch,
A book of poems, one that Grace
Had treasured long, whose pages bore
The traces of her loving choice,
When on the margin of a leaf
I found these verses lightly traced:

“O Childhood! thy thought is the breeze
That sports with the bloom of the earth;
Thy glance is the glow of the dawn,
And the gush of the brooklet thy mirth.

“O Manhood! thy passions are winds
That sweep that frail bloom from their path;
Thy glance is the blaze of the noon,
And lightning that sears is thy wrath.

“O Age! in thy voice is the moan
Of surges that die on the shore;
Thy glance is the light of a star
That setteth to rise nevermore.

“O Life! to the infinite waste
Is lifted thy gaze of despair;
Thy voice is the sob of a world
Grown weary of answerless prayer.”

And while I mused upon the words,
I heard a light step drawing near;
And did not close the open book,

But held it wide, as, with a smile,
Grace leaned above me, looking down
To note the lines that held my thought.
A sudden flush swept cheek and brow,
As on the faintly-pencilled words
Her swift glance fell; and, starting back,
She faltered low: "I had forgot;
Will you forget them too?—and yet,"
With sudden passion in her voice,
"And yet, perchance, they touch a truth."
"Turns life to you so sad a face?
I would your eyes might feel the smile
That gleams beneath her solemn gaze."
"And have *you*, then, found life so sweet?"
"So passing sweet and wonderful,
That when the sun, from deeps unknown,
Uplifts another shining day,
And lays it down before my feet,
I bow my heart in reverent joy."

The trembling barriers of reserve,
Before strong tides of feeling fell,

And with clasped hands, and head thrown
back,

She let the pent-up thought of years
Burst forth, with rush of rapid words :

“I cannot feel the far-off sun ;

A chilly shadow folds my heart ;

And through the music of the world

I hear a mighty wail of woe

From trampled souls that bleed and die ;

Beyond brief life I see a gulf

Wherein fall joy and pain alike,

And darkness is the end of all !

Some talk of life and hope beyond,

And smile at death ; but who can sound

The dark abysses of the grave ?

We dream of light ; but through our dream

The mocking voice of doubt sounds on.

‘Deluded souls ! ’tis but a dream !’

We search for God ; but tangled creeds

Have barred the path ; we lose our way,

And know not where to seek His throne :

Life drags, we know not whence nor why,

Across the desert sands of fate,
Its pauseless, hopeless, endless march ;
And yet, in ringing words of cheer,
You call it 'Passing sweet !' What dream,
What madness of the brain, is this ?"

A wave of pity swept my thought
Beyond the narrow bounds of speech.
Before my feet a quivering soul
Lay panting in defiant pain ;
A tender, homeless, wounded soul
That, fallen on dark ways of doubt,
Writhed helpless on the jagged rocks ;
And all my love in holy fire
Of yearning prayer flamed up to heaven :
"Lord, though I may not feel her heart
Against my own, oh let me feel
That I have laid it at Thy feet !"
A strange, deep calm came o'er my soul ;
The mighty pain of passion, merged
In love made pure of self, grew sweet ;
And tenderly, as to a child,

I spoke the thought that words could reach :

“Dear wanderer in a Father’s world,
Within His wide embrace of love
Doth all life lie ; no cold response
From distant skies to earth’s deep moan
Of helpless anguish hath God given,
But, stooping low, hath shared the cup
So bitter to our shrinking lips :

Like fleeting clouds in summer skies,
O’ershone by His incarnate love,
Your doubts shall melt ; pause not for
creeds ;

Draw near and lift your gaze to His.”

“O give me proof ! for doubt sees naught
Beyond a shifting throng of doubts !”

“Truth, to the soul that seeks but truth
With single aim, shall prove itself :

No eye e’er craved a lesser light

To prove the shining of the sun,

And God His own best witness is

Within the soul that seeks His face.

Fear not ; for through your haunting dream

Shall break the daylight world of faith."
A smile within her troubled glance
Dawned, glimmering like a sudden star
Through parted clouds; and murmuring
low—

"If doubt be then the dream, and faith
The daylight world where phantoms fade,
Oh pray that on my longing eyes
Its light may break!" she turned away;
And I, once more alone, sent forth
In tenderness unspeakable
My longing heart to wage with hers
The weary war of struggling faith.

While day by day life gently poured
Returning strength along my veins,
My heart, by slow and sweet release
From pain's relaxing grasp set free,
Looked out on life with tranquil gaze,
That, filled with light of present joy,
Saw not the deepening shade of pain
That lay beyond: the morning came

And brought, as surely as the light
That waked the birds, the happier light
That waked within my soul the joy
And melody of life; and Night,
Star holy, pure and calm, her hand
Upon my throbbing sense laid soft,
And led me unto shrines of prayer,
Where I might lay my longings deep
Within the changeless peace of God.
Through all those sunny days, my thoughts
With one dear step kept rhythmic beat—
A step that over fancy's range
Of visioned heights, and o'er the green
And dewy meads of tenderness,
Moved fleet and noiseless as the light.
Around the woman-heart of Grace
An added shyness—from the hour
When, suddenly set free, her thought
Had fluttered trembling to my breast—
Clung like a wreath of mountain mist
That, parted by a sudden gust,
Reveals a peak, then folds it close.

Oft, when round Arthur's easel grouped
We filled the hours with rippling mirth,
A sudden stillness o'er her face
Would fall; and in her laughing eyes
A far, faint glory gleam and fade
Like sunsets over Alpine snows;
And, drawing near her unaware,
My footsteps oft would seem to break
A strain that held her listening ear,
As, with a start and fleeting blush,
Her truant thought she summoned home.

Each morning, on the little stand
Where lay my treasured books, I found,
Placed by her gentle hand, a vase,
That lifted to the morning light,
From nest of green, one snow-white flower,
With spotless gleam of dewy leaves;
And when I, wondering, lightly asked
The reason of her constant choice,
With down-drooped lids she answered low:
"They are the angels of the flowers,

And wear no passion-hues of earth."
And then I wondered more, and weighed
With doubtful thought her faltered words.

A silence, tremulous and stirred
With quivering movements of two souls,
That thrilled to feel their garments touch,
Drew round us as the days went by;
And, fearful by the lightest breath
To break its sweet and subtle spell,
I stilled each throb of beating love
And held my spirit strangely calm.
A slow, soft change, like brightening dawn,
Or deepening green of early leaves,
Stole o'er her face, and on her brow
There fell the still, clear light of peace.
She spoke no word, and yet I knew
Her weary soul was nestling close
Within the waiting arms of God.
And when one day I sat alone,
She passed me with a timid haste,

And, scarcely pausing, in my hand
Let gently fall this gift of joy:

DREAMING AND WAKING.

Alone, beneath an awful sky,
 A starless, vacant sky,
In visions of the night I stood:
 A moaning wind swept by,
 And through the dark, a cry—
The mingled wail of many lips—
 Was borne on high.

Then through my dream there broke a
 voice
 From realms beyond the night:
Awake! awake! the skies are clear,
 And, on thy sealèd sight
 Fall floods of golden light
From radiant springs beyond the sweep
 Of azure height.

The dream hath fled ; the joyous heaven
Smiles o'er mine unsealed eyes :
Beyond the far horizon verge
The dim night vanquished flies ;
The green earth peaceful lies,
With fresh bloom glad, and songs of birds
That wing the skies.

By love's resistless tide o'erswept,
I bent, and touched the written words
With trembling lips ; while in my heart
Rose longings, helpless, passionate,
To fling their hopeless agony
Against the stony front of fate.

Some moments are there in our lives
When, stripped of all disguise, and strong,
The crouching passions of the soul,
That slumbered till we deemed them dead,
Leap suddenly to giant life,
And close around the wavering will
That trembles in their mighty grasp ;

And in that awful solitude
Behind the bounds of flesh, there meet
The powers whose soundless warfare fills
The world, and shapes the fates of men.
Such moments knew I, lying prone,
Her message crushed within my grasp;
The outer world, and time and sense,
I knew not, while the spirit strove
And grappled with its viewless foes.
Youth, bearing in its eager pulse
A wordless prophecy of joy—
A subtle kinship in its veins
With all the gladness of the earth
And sky, and every living thing,
Treads regally, with lifted brows
That claim their crown of coming bliss;
And when life fronts it suddenly
With circlet sharp of thorns, it shrinks,
And stands at bay in wild revolt;
The spirit of my youth, grown fierce
With long denial, thus at bay,
Writhed madly in the grasp of pain,

And vainly flung its fettered hands
To clutch a joy beyond its reach.
For let not those who walk the earth
In calm accord with lines of grace
And symmetries of form, forget
That we on whom no human eye
E'er rests with joy, have hearts that leap
As swift and sudden at a glance,
A voice, a touch, as hearts that beat
In forms of faultless mould; we too
Can love; and, though we may not hope,
May yet despair! Aye, woe to us
When, through the dimness where we sit
Apart from men, the torturer steals
To lay us on the rack of love!
On those dark hours no eye may look
Save only His, who, while we pant
In mortal anguish, lays His hand
Upon our brows, and whispers low:
"There is a joy that none may share
Save they whose wills have found repose
Within the perfect will of God;

The meek inheritors of earth
Who, empty-handed though they stand,
Are yet partakers by a reach
Of larger love, a grasp divine,
In all the good of all the world."
So spake His voice within my soul,
Above its tumult rising clear ;
And as I listened, o'er my will
There fell a deep and mighty peace ;
And like to one who slowly wakes
Sore wounded on a battle-field,
And in the hush of early dawn,
While stars melt softly overhead,
Is 'ware of victory after strife,
I lay, not painless, yet at rest,
And felt a stirring as of wings
That hovered o'er my weary heart.

An hour had passed, one little hour,
And all the current of my life
Was changed. While, in the pause of will
That follows triumph dearly won,

I took no thought of days to come,
There flashed before me, like a face
Seen long before in happier years,
The memory of a letter, read
And flung aside while yet I trod
The blooming haunts of silent love,
And recked not where they led my feet :
A letter from an artist friend,
Who in the elder world had found
The royal feast the kings of art
Bequeathed us when they left the earth ;
And now, to make his bliss complete,
Would have me share it at his side.
Then sharply, suddenly, I felt
The snapping of the slender tie
Between my life and all that made
It fair, and knew that I must go ;
I could not lie in beggar's guise
Beside the door of one most rich
In all the precious gifts of God,
Most pitiful of others' lack,
To crave with silent plea a boon

She might not give, and wring her heart
With unavailing pain, a blot,
A shadow on her sunny way :
And as one fallen from a height
Whereon midst bloom and light he walked
Serene, looks up with failing gaze
And sees the leaves that lightly sway
Against the blue far overhead,
I looked upon the life I loved,
Then turned to face a life that seemed
As bleak and grey as twilight skies
When sunset's heart of fire has ceased
To beat, and all the air is pale.

With firm intent to bar the gates
Of strong resolve against surprise
Of traitorous will, I rose and wrote :
"My friend, I grasp across the sea
Your proffered hand, and come to sup
Beside you at the feast of art."
The letter in my hand, I sought
The two I loved, resolved to seal

My purpose with a swift farewell.
By Arthur's easel, where the brush,
Just laid aside to wait his hand,
Lay idle, Grace I found alone ;
A stillness pure and deeply sweet
As silences of morning air
Before the day has found a voice
Was in the face she slowly raised
To meet my gaze ; and flinging back
The hungry pain that clutched my heart,
I caught her joy and held it warm
Against my breast, and with a smile
That met her wordless greeting, said :
"In vain we seek to reach with words
The joys whose flow, unfathomed, sweeps
From soul to soul : I can but say—
Behold, your joy supreme is mine !
As in your lifted eyes I read
The open secret of a heart
At rest upon the heart of God.
Dear friend, that God has made you fair,
Has clothed with robing of pure grace

A soul as stainless, clear and glad
As sunlit spray on breaking waves ;
As swift and eager in its sweep
Toward heavenly heights as mounting
 flame,
I thank Him, thank Him more, that I,
Unworthy save by humble right
Of utmost reverence, yet have stood
Within the radiance of your life,
And filled my spirit with a light
That even through the outer dark
So soon to fold me round, will shine
Across my dim and lonely way.
Dear friend, the bitter word I came
To speak is even this: 'Farewell !'
I fain would find another, fit
And sweeter, but it may not be—
And so, 'Farewell.' I take my life
Across the sea to seek a path
Which, though it leads away from joy,
May reach at last the heights of peace."

With drooping face and tender smile,
That trembled like a changeful gleam
Of summer sun through tossing leaves,
She listened till that word, "Farewell,"
Smote with a sudden blow her heart,
And then I saw her shrink; the lips
That would have quivered, closed; a wave
Of deepening crimson rose and fell,
And left her pale; and when I ceased
She looked upon me with a look
That all the years have never dimmed;
It was as if her spirit stood
Beyond a darkly yawning gulf
That none might leap, and beckoned me;
And passion, yet uncrushed, arose
And bade me of her pity make
A link to join our severed lives.
A moment stood I motionless,
Through all my being 'ware of naught
But that appealing gaze; and then,
Like one who frees his captive limbs
With sudden wrench from tightening bonds,

I broke the silence, breathing low —
“God keep you, and farewell!” then turned,
Not waiting for a word or sign,
And left her standing mute and pale.

PART IV.

Like painful, half-forgotten dreams,
I feel again the sailing on
'Twixt boundless wastes of sea and sky,
That seemed to ache with loneliness;
The landing on an alien shore
Ungladdened by a friendly eye;
The weary shifting of the scenes
Whose strangeness was a constant grief;
And then the meeting with a mind
That overbrimmed with sparkling life,
And swept me in its eager rush
Beyond the dead, unchanging calm
Of stagnant hope. One purpose strong
And strengthening with the strength of soul
Inwrought by fires of pain, upheld
And led me through the days, while still
My heart was bleeding out of sight:

The purpose, if I might, to wed
The art I loved to holiest truth,
And send it forth to war with sense.
They told me at the school of art,
Where with my friend I joined the ranks
Of combatants for high success,
That hues and forms were in my power
To wield at will; and all the wise—
Those magnates of a narrow world
Who see the universe revolve
Around a square of canvas—spoke,
And bade me most of all beware
Of flimsy dreams, and make my hand
The slavish pupil of the eye,
Recording only what appears;
Their realism, held on high
As creed, meant simply working close
To nature while she moulds the clay
Around a soul, and heeding not
The spark divine that glimmers through;
And I, who nursed no hope of fame,
Nor cared to cheat the multitude

With soulless reflex of a world
Made vital with the breath of God,
Went on my way, and strove to work
Within the sphere of art, as God
In nature, bodying viewless truth
In gracious forms to haunt the soul,
And hush the clamorous cries of sense
With breathings of a strain divine.

The years brought healing as they came,
And strength, and peace; and life to me
Was holy, calm, and gravely sweet,
Without a sting, and full of hope:
A hope that reached beyond the bound
Where joy and pain are blending waves
That never rest. Across the sea
My earliest friend still kept a thought
That turned to me, and letters came
That told me of the life he led,
The love that crowned him with a crown
Above all price—Ah, she was fair,
His peerless one! I could not know

How fair! For all his pictures, drawn
With pen of flame, were colorless
Beside the truth; and then a name
That, moon-like, hid the lesser light
Of common words, would seem to shine
Alone, and I would read of Grace,
Who grew, he wrote half playfully,
A sweet and pensive nun, whose life
Moved outward through the lives she
served,

Who gathered children at her knee,
And taught them tenderly, and soothed
The friendless in their dying hours,
And ministered to all whose needs
Reached out to touch her loving heart.
“You would not know our sportive Grace,”
He said, “so calm and grave she grows,
So quietly she moves, and sings
Her songs no more about the house,
Save softly, as one might to lull
A restless child: she speaks of you—
Not often, nor with many words—

For speech with her as one divines
Is not the measure of the heart ;
Yet speaks she with a touch of pride,
And tenderly, and well I know
She bears you in her steadfast thought.
Each day a flower is on your stand ;—
‘He may come back!’ she says, and smiles.”
So reading, through my pulses ran
A yearning thrill of memory,
And like a tyrant fain to prove
His questioned power, the past arose
And shook my being with a touch.
One day—that seemed like other days,
Yet cloaked a shadow with its sun—
A letter, hailed with gladness, came
To mock the healing of the years,
And quicken to intenser life
A slumbering pain :—a letter, brief,
But throbbing as alive with beats
Of dread that strove to still themselves
As fearful of a fear betrayed.
Grace, coming from the bed of one

Who died of fever, drooped, yet scorned
To yield, until the fever sprang
And wrapped her in its fiery coils ;
And now through day and night she lay,
A ghostly shadow of herself,
That slowly wasted, hour by hour.

So wrote he ; and a horror strange
And cold crept through me as I read ;
While thought and will and reason paused,
And nothing in me lived but pain.
There is a yearning on whose swell,
Resistless as the mighty heave
Of ocean's breast, the soul is borne
Far out beyond the calmer mood
Wherein it moved in still resolve ;
And such a yearning, solemn, strong,
And almost holy in its depth
Of passionless, despairing calm,
Uplifted me above all doubts,
And bore me on to seek the face
That, through my every mood of mind,

Had shone with pure and constant light,
As shines the wide and steadfast heaven
Through every wandering wind that blows.
One hope, one only hope, I held
And would not look beyond; the hope
To stand beside the one I loved,
When love of mine, no more a snare
To lure her life from happier love,
Should lie among the things of earth
Behind her, with no power to bind
In any wise the passing soul.
For strangely did I seem aware
That death had claimed her, and no doubt
Disturbed me saying, "Should she live,
Then love revealed were still a chain
Around her heart"; and so I went.

Once more I felt the boundless waste
Of sea and sky—an azure pause
Between the voices of the worlds—
And then the days of blank suspense
Were ended, and I knew she lived;

And, journeying, stood without the door
Where oft of old my eager heart
Had waited for a coming foot ;
There Arthur met me, sad and worn,
And saying only, "Death is near,
For I have seen his shadow fall ;
Yet tarries, while we fear to feel
The moments passing"; clasped my hand
And led me in ; the silent house,
So eloquent of buried joys,
Was like an added wound to one
Already dead ; a numb suspense
Of feeling held me as I stood
And mutely waited for the word
That bade me seek that chamber dim
Wherein the radiance of my youth
Was fading slowly from the earth.

A darkness with a central heart
Of throbbing light, the chamber seemed,
As entering in, I only saw
Her eyes that turned to mine, her smile

That lightened strangely through the
gloom ;
And from the darkness came her voice,—
The same, yet sweeter, with a thrill
Of mystic sweetness caught from heaven ;
I heard it softly breathe my name :
Then, after silence, while our souls
Reached forth and touched through meet-
ing eyes,—
From out that twilight border-land
'Twixt earth and heaven, where passion
dies,
And love is pure—she spoke again :
“'Twas so I saw it, yet the years
Have touched it with an added light :
The eyes are steadfast as of old,
But tenderer, and the mouth—ah, there !
'Twas sorrow graved that deeper line,—
I know her hand ; and now come near,
That I may feel your touch once more,
Your living touch, and know you live,
Though I must die.” Then at that word

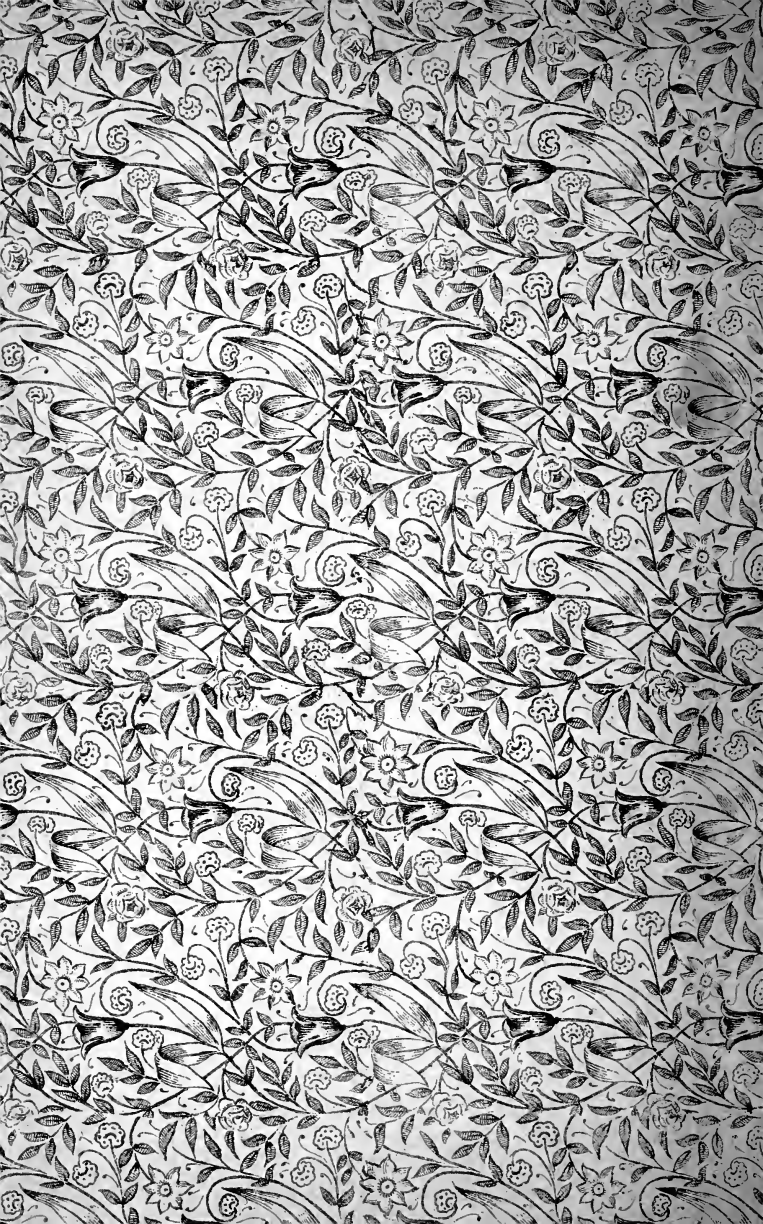
The veil of silence round my heart
Was rent away, and love leaped forth
In agony, to cope with death.
“O Love! O Love! you may not die
And leave me on the empty earth,
Whose very air will dumbly wait
The voice it stills itself to hear!
O love, live on! and let me feel
Through all the world your beating heart!”
So spake I wildly, bending low
My head upon the hand I clasped.
“And you have loved me!”—with a thrill
Of trembling joy her answer fell.
“My saint, whose aureole of flame
Has led me on o’er rugged ways
And up the steep of high resolve,
My love, whose lightest smile could make
A silent gladness in my heart
Too sweet for words,—ah, had I known!
Dear love, you lightly weighed my heart
To deem it might not leap the bars
Of outward form to clasp a soul

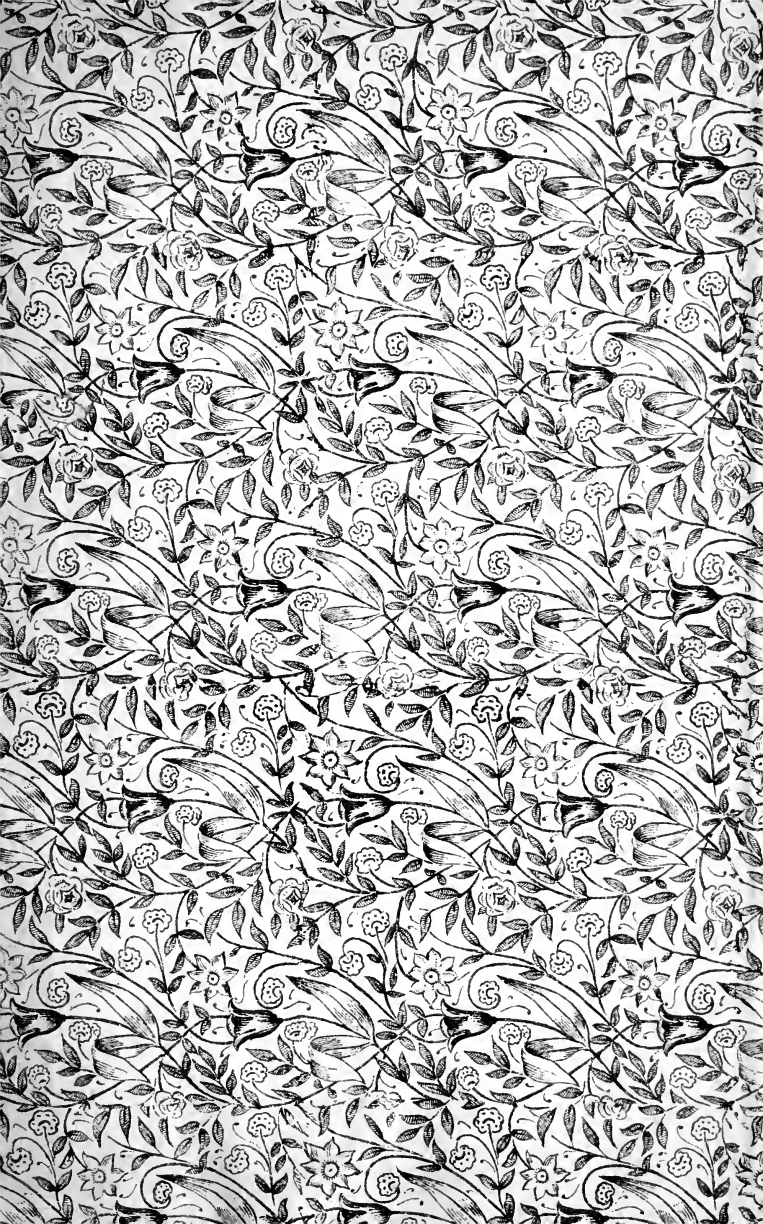
That stood so near to God a light
Was on it from His face ; and now
'Tis death that clasps our parted hands,
And draws us heart to heart at last,
With touch of pity, ere we part :
And yet, we part not ; love to love
Can reach, across the silent void
Between the worlds, and we shall know
We live and love forevermore.
Ah, we have felt the weary ache
Of longing, while the heavy days,
Slow moving, bore us on apart ;
But now the throbbing pain is still ;
Beloved, lay upon my brow
The seal of love, that death may see,
And, smiling, touch me tenderly."
With reverent lips, as one might touch
An angel's wing, I kissed her brow,
And far uplifted o'er the heights
Of joy and pain our spirits met
Within the silent infinite
Of Heaven's untroubled, changeless love.

The moments passing touched us not,
Nor knew we fear, till suddenly
The hovering wings of death swept close ;
His breath was on her cheek ; her eyes,
That ever dwelt on mine, grew dim ;
And then I knew the soul within
Had soared to light, while like a cloud
The earth around me darkly drew.
Down slowly shortening aisles of time
That widen out to larger light—
Companioned by a shape serene
Undimmed by earthly years—I move
Beside the paths of other men :
A spring of peace, that ever wells
From deeps beneath the fickle flow
Of earthly joy, o'erfloods my heart.
The flower toward which with quickening
 life

Our nature yearns—the flower of love—
Has bloomed in mine, and, fading not,
Has felt the touch of God and grown
Immortal : oft through veils of sense

Uplifted suddenly, I catch
A brightening gleam from far within,
And o'er the voices of the world
I hear a music beating clear
From spirits tuned to perfect rest :
Beneath the agonies of men
I feel—the Cross—the deep response
Of God to pain ; beneath their sin,
The Cross—the sign and pledge of love
That all the ages shall not waste,
Nor change, nor ever swerve aside
From any soul of man that lives.





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